

LYSANDRA CORIDON (LEP.: LYCAENIDAE) IN
THE NORTH : THE BERMUDA TRIANGLE?

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Recently, while preparing an article on the possible historical presence of the chalkhill blue butterfly (*Lysandra coridon*. Poda) in Yorkshire (Settle), I came across an article by A. E. Wright disputing the hitherto almost unanimously accepted records for the insect in Lancashire and Westmoreland. For two reasons I had never disputed these old records nor had I noticed their absence from the National Distribution Maps. Firstly because they have been reproduced in virtually every work from Coleman (1860) to Howarth (1973) and secondly because I possess a specimen with full data from the area in question. Since the validity of these records was central to the theme of my original article, and because their rejection to me constituted the "Bermuda Triangle" of entomology I looked again into the matter.

Wright's argument is convincing and for various reasons must stand but on reading the article, together with examining other evidence, one is left with the feeling that all has not been said, that evidence, however circumstantial, has been overlooked and that on occasion individuals have been given a 'bad press'. Wright's arguments ran briefly thus:

1. Stainton (1857) did not mention any records for the area. It is noteworthy here that neither did Stainton mention records for Lincolnshire.
2. That no records were available prior to 1859, in which year Anthony Mason apparently showed a series to none less than the eminent entomologist C. S. Gregson supposedly taken at Grange — the year being unspecified but most probably 1858 or 1859 — and apparently adding that the butterfly was the commonest blue present. Gregson reporting the incident in the *Entomologist's Weekly Intelligencer* (1859) expressed "surprise" at the captures. Wright casts further doubt on Mason's testimony by quoting an advertisement which he placed in the same journal (1857. 2 : 147) requesting *coridon* in exchange for other species, the implication being that the series shown to Gregson in 1859 were those obtained by exchange in 1857 and that this dubious business was the origin of all subsequent and false reports of *coridon* as a Grange insect.
3. That despite the numerous records from Grange, Warton Crag, Silverdale, Arnsdale, Milnthorpe, Beetham from 1859 to 1892 and Witherslack in 1910, in no case does the recorder appear to have seen or taken the insect himself, nor can any of their

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specimens be traced. The well known entomologist B. H. Crabtree is quoted in this latter respect and J. Davis Ward, an experienced Grange entomologist, is quoted (diaries) as regarding all Grange records as "very doubtful". Similarly H. Massey (in Tutt 1910).

The recorders quoted by Wright — apart from Mason — included J. B. Hodgkinson who gave most of the above stations in Newman (1869); Alfred Owne (in Newman 1869), Grange; Robert Marris (in Morris 1870), Grange; J. Arkle (1886), Grange; George Loxham (in Forsythe, 1905), Warton Crag and Arnside Tower. There is another record briefly referred to by Wright. Hodgkinson (1888) reports "This butterfly (*coridon*) used to occur at Grisedale at the foot of Saddleback in Cumberland. I have seen specimens taken there by Mr. Hope of Penrith." This again is circumstantial and after examining this record in connection with Yorkshire *coridon* I am inclined to feel that the relationship between Grisedale, Saddleback and the larval foodplant horseshoe vetch (*Hippocrepis comosa*) is suspect. There is however one of the several Grisedales near to Tebay and adjacent to a recorded station for horseshoe vetch. Nevertheless poor Mr. Hope it seems is likely to suffer the same fate as Anthony Mason

4. That Porritt in his List and Supplement of the Lepidoptera of Yorkshire (1883 and 1903) did not give *coridon* as a Yorkshire insect. In this context it is worth noting that Porritt is known to have missed or disregarded records which, even if unacceptable, merited a footnote, including the Settle one for *coridon*. Hodgkinson (1885) recalled that some twenty years previously a man from Settle had told him that the chalkhill blue flew "in profusion about or near Settle and Bentham." Apparently the man, of whom we know nothing, had pictures (most probably a decorative display) made of the butterfly. Hodgkinson in an interesting but again inconclusive reference to Warton Crag continues "The species till lately existed under Warton Crag near Carnforth, ground that I go over at all times of the year. Where *Thecla quercus* and *L. corydon* used to swarm, not one has been seen for years."

Interestingly, Settle is but twenty miles from the other localities and is a recorded station for horseshoe vetch, as in fact are all the other stations given for *coridon*. It is easy to overlook this point at a time when the larval foodplant for *coridon* was not determined.

Wright cannot have seen the above reference to Yorkshire *coridon* nor can he have seen the letter in the same journal (*Naturalist* 1885) in which Herbert Goss writes "this species certainly occurred in abundance in the neighbourhood of Silverdale. In the autumn of 1870 I received a number of specimens of it from Mr. James

Murton.” Goss continues in a reference to none other than Anthony Mason “and I was informed in June 1883 by Mr. Anthony Mason that this species though previously unknown in the district had suddenly appeared in abundance at Silverdale in 1869 or 1870 and had as suddenly disappeared.”

This then leaves us with another series reputedly taken in the area, another recorder in Mr. Murton and Mr. Masons continued insistence that the butterfly was at least formerly present, this time at Silverdale. Four series in all including one said to have been taken in 1910 at Witherslack by Mallinson but dismissed by Wright because none had been seen subsequently. But what do we make of the maligned Anthony Mason; had he like Seaman and his black hairstreak, discovered a gold mine in the North, was he a romancer, or a serious but now misunderstood entomologist? Gregson evidently did not doubt him, his “surprise” lay in the fact that the captures of *coridon* were on limestone and not chalk; in the same note he mentions Masons first recording of the brown hairstreak (*Thecla betulae*. L.) at Grange — a record which was substantiated subsequently. Gregson would in any event surely have cleared publication with Mason who as an occasional contributor to the *Intelligencer* after this seems to have had nothing to hide. Also we do not even know whether Mason obtained any *coridon* by his advertisement.

Of the other recorders mentioned by Wright, Marris may be dismissed, reference to Morris (1853, first edition) illustrates the point. But why did Hodgkinson an “old friend” of Gregson and a highly competent and respected entomologist who had worked the general area for years, repeatedly lend his name apparently without personal sightings to these records? In considering this question we should recall that he had seen at least one series purporting to have been taken in the district and by his own admission had not visited Arnside until 1877. We should realise that areas now well worked and accessible were not so then and that the history of entomological recording is littered with surprises. Massey (in Tutt 1910) says of Arnside “twenty five years ago, very little worked entomologically” and the same was certainly said of Settle about 1880.

Since commencing a compilation of records of the butterflies of the Doncaster district I have become uneasy about the dismissal of old records on the grounds that the insect should have been seen more frequently or that more specimens should exist. There are single but unimpeachable nineteenth century records for species here for which no specimens can be found. Murder without the body is difficult to prove but in the old days labelling was usually absent, incomplete, or numerical.

Then there is the question of my specimen which has printed data: C. F. Johnson.. Witherslack 1913 and handwritten 2 (or 21)

8. I had always suspected this data until I learned from Wright of Mallinsons reported capture of five specimens in 1910 at Witherslack. Johnson was a respected entomologist and a Fellow of the Entomological Society of London; moreover I have ascertained that he did visit Witherslack in 1913. Clearly Mallinson's specimens cannot now be dismissed so lightly. It is I think unlikely that at least the earlier — if genuine — records were the result of bred releases in view of the uncertainty regarding the foodplant which in contemporary literature was given as "various vetches, *Lotus*, *Anthyllis* and wild thyme". How well the larvae accept other of these plants in captivity I am unsure since my breeding of *coridon* is restricted to horseshoe vetch.

That so many recorders could have believed, that several series should apparently have been taken and seen and that the precise areas involved should contain the then undetermined larval foodplant, all in the total absence of the butterfly seems almost to ask too much, but it may indeed be so. There is, however, one last thought. It is well known that some species undergo periodic and sometimes violent fluctuation in numbers, climate and range undoubtedly being factors and that *coridon* if ever it was present near Grange was at the edge of its range. Masons reported years of abundance for *coridon* at Grange and Silverdale were 1858 or 1859 and 1869 or 1870 respectively, followed by rapid decline at Silverdale. Examination of climatic records for 1847 to 1875 reveals that the only four hot summers during the period were 1857, 1859, 1868 and 1870; 1858 marginally missing the group and 1869 being average.

It is tempting to think that at least the very early records were not unreasonable and that even though later ones may have been hearsay Anthony Mason might have witnessed and recorded the passing of a relict population at the extremes of its range.

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WINTER RECORDS OF THE PAINTED LADY BUTTERFLY, CYNTHIA CARDUI L. — Whether the painted lady is able to sometimes overwinter in the south of England is difficult to prove unless "hibernating" individuals are found alive in late winter. To my knowledge this has never been recorded and the pattern of occurrence of the few mid-winter records suggest that these butterflies may have been primary immigrants. Over the Christmas and New Year period of 1987/88 there have been, so far, eighteen records of the painted lady:

CORNWALL E. Portwrinkle, 25.12 (S. Madge); St Clear, 25.12 (P. J. Reay); Siblyback Reservoir, 31.12.87 (D. & G. Conway); Portscatho, 6.1.88 (G. Jackson); Salter Mill, Carr Green, 7.1.88 (S. Madge); Portholland 16.1.88 (R. Lane).

CORNWALL W. Phillack, Hayle, "late December" (L. P. Williams); Marazion, 7.1.88 (C. C. Barnard).

DEVON S. Devonport, 23.12 (A. R. Pease); Ernsettle, Plymouth, 24.12 (R. W. Gould); Plymouth, 25.12, two, and one, 5.2.88 (A. Archer-Lock).

DORSET. Worbarrow Bay, 25.12; Studland, 31.12, two, (K. N. Baskcomb).

SUSSEX E. Lewes, 20.12; Brighton, 22.12 (R. Leverton per C. R. Pratt).

Mr. Penhallurick, of the Truro Museum, has traced a further, early record — January 17th. 1936 St. Marys, Isles of Scilly (R. Trotter), and in 1966 there were three early records of the painted lady in Cornwall: February 2nd. Downderry (S. C. Madge); February 6th. Mevagissey (Unknown) and February 26th. Pendower (R. D. Penhallurick).

R. F. Bretherton tells me that he has been unable to trace any December records for the painted lady in the British Isles, apart from a single record for 6.12.1979 (Archer-Lock, *Ent. Rec.* 92: 87), at least since 1940, but that in 1952 there was a substantial early immigration of Lepidoptera between February 21st. and